

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

Good morning all Respected Members of the Committee on Human Services.

Please Note: Testimony for Bill #636 and other bills listed below main testimony

**Thank you for this opportunity to testify and address
Proposed Bill #636 – An Act Concerning the Presumption of
Innocence and Preservation of Constitutional Rights in
Proceedings Alleging Child Abuse or Neglect by a Parent or
Guardian.**

My name is Alice B. Buttwell. I live in New Milford, CT, having relocated here to CT in 1996 from N.J. with my husband and child who has multiple, complex special care needs.

My family's personal story is an extremely compelling one. However, there are also many other families and providers who have testified with similar or different real-life, human stories that lend itself to public awareness of something that each of us would never even have known unless a child, parent, guardian and/or family actually becomes LIVING PROOF that we are guilty unless we can be proven innocent. For many of us when we sought out help for our vulnerable child, specifically with special care needs, or in a temporary family crises looking for support or services, or there is a call made by anyone to their hotline, democracy is taken away when DCF walks into your life.

Our families have not only been traumatized, we have become displaced citizens. Many of us have been given an extreme living death sentence for something that we are victims of because our constitutional rights are not protected in human services cases of child abuse and neglect. The reality is that we do not get a fair trial like that is given to people charged with criminal offenses.

When both the child and his parents are innocent and haven't even been given a fair and evidentiary hearing or trial, everything related to their lives and current situation has been hearsay, poor and misleading documentation, no facts, personal judgment by lay people, rubber-stamping by judge, discrimination, breach of confidentiality or HIPPA laws, harassment, threats,

mistakes made in systems by state agency staff, no monitoring or oversight, poor administrative management, no accountability, abuse of power in employment, dishonesty, lack of knowledge or disregard to laws, policies and procedures and rights of disabled or non-disabled children and parents or guardians, little to no real proof, no valid witness/es, no chance to even fight back, show facts or have their side of the story told nor real-hard evidence against DCF can be presented. Innocent family victims suffer needless pain and suffering, while their lives are wasted and destroyed. Taxpayer dollars, state and federal funds and priceless time are not being used efficiently and effectively. DCF, outside contractors, court-appointed attorneys, even other related state agencies and others in the system who contributed to making mistakes are NOT held accountable and can go home to their families, while continuing to be paid salaries and state benefits.

Our son was left in a behaviorally-challenged emergency room for 22 days at 16-years old where he stayed in confinement while being exposed to numerous people, adults and adolescents, who were in various stages of mental health crises. That was in June 2004. He was taken out by two complete stranger DCF social workers, and admitted to a DCF facility for abused and neglected children without his mother and without having any contact with his mother for the first few weeks. There was no legal or justifiable reason for him not to see or speak to his mother. We had not committed any crime nor had our son been abused, neglected or uncared for. During our first telephone conversation he asked if I still loved him. After that call, he started to get very sick and decompensated. That was also the beginning of treating me like a criminal by DCF area office staff and a very small handful of staff at the facility. I will not elaborate here about what happened prior, during or after. I will note that DCF had a new chief administrator who was fired a few years later who had headed that facility and Riverview Hospital.

Our son's individual and family treatment plan was inappropriate. He was not cared for appropriately and nearly died in one placement. At 17 years old he was told he would never ever go home again for the rest of his life. How can anyone predetermine this and make such a hopeless statement to a vulnerable adolescent with special care needs who was traumatized, ripped away unnecessarily from supportive and nurturing care of his loving family without any warning nor family closure? Later on before the final hearing, the social worker and assistant attorney offered us our son back in writing through court-appointed attorneys. They stated that they would give us son back to us when he turned 18 if we would not go into the court, and instead plead "no

contesto, uncared for special needs”. I found this to be appalling and unethical to use a vulnerable human being as a ‘bargaining pawn’. It is my understanding that many people are not aware that if the parents win their case and get their child back, they will lose them again for neglect as DCF will no longer provide services to those parent who prevail.

I am strongly in favor of passing this bill as soon as possible. I do not believe in an open court hearing as this would also lend itself to intrusion of private family matters. However, I am in favor of giving the parent/s the right to choose whether or not they want to have the hearing and/or trial held in an open or a closed court.

I am very grateful to all of you who can help to make change this possible. I have lost everything in my life because of DCF, my son, my former home, my self-esteem and dignity, my health, as they tried to slander, abuse and mistreat me and destroy my credibility as a responsible and educated mother and professional. In time I would like to share my personal story with facts and evidence.

Re. HB #6145 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #6149 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #5982 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #6149 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #6150 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #5425 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #5842 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #5421 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.
Re. HB #6352 – I am strongly in favor of this bill.

Re. HB #5232 – I am in favor of this bill - under the condition that the parent/guardian is directly involved in the overall treatment plan, is eir child’s needs, knowledgeable about their child and their child’s needs, and monitors the child’s treatment with a team, and listens to the child’s concerns, taking into consideration the child with a holistic approach to his/her needs overall, develops and monitors a multi-faceted treatment plan for any change, positive or negative, and works

to make any necessary adjustments as needed, and not compartmentalized into one area, and makes careful decisions in the best interests of the child overall.

Re. HB #5980 – I am strongly in favor of this bill if it applies to all children's matters. This will ensure that there are no mistakes made ahead of time or verify or dismiss that retaliation was/was not made by anonymous and/or mandated reporters, that often lead to more costly mistakes in time money, attorney search and fees, childcare, people's lives, wear & tear of additional stress level of innocent and vulnerable victims, other state employee time, and related costly mistakes (ex court time, people involved in court, loss of wages, transportation, irreparable damage, harm or humiliation to children and parents/caregivers, unnecessary tests and court-ordered psychological evaluations and unnecessary costly treatment meetings and goals set by dept social workers, gathering of unnecessary documentation, taxpayer, state and federal-related funds for each case, other hidden costs). There is sometimes tendency to put blame on the parent as the mandated reporter or anonymous caller wants to resolve an issue that should be resolved through other appropriate channels, but instead diverts the problem to DCF as an alternative way sometimes as retaliation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
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